The Northern Territory Chief Minister, Marshall Perron, said today his Government's campaign to get the major political parties to commit to the completion of the Adelaide to Darwin railway had been vindicated.

"Both parties are now committed to spending $3million to complete the necessary surveying work, and a Hewson Government has given the whole project urgent status.

"The NT Government's stance has been vindicated despite the carping of Labor's Territory politicians," Mr Perron said.

"Six weeks ago the railway was not even on the political agenda, now we have both parties at least willing to take the first step."

However, Mr Perron said that the Government would not let the matter rest with just surveying for the line.

"We are determined that the new Federal Government after Saturday will not only survey the route but begin building the railway before the year is out."

He said that the best hope for that was the election of a Coalition Government.

"John Hewson has personally backed the project and accepted that it is a Commonwealth project.

"He has said he will refer the project to the Ralph committee for urgent consideration under the $3billion Rebuild Australia Fund."

But, Mr Perron said, Paul Keating had only reached for the project in the dying days of the election campaign in the vain hope of saving a Labor seat in South Australia.

"Given some of Mr Keating's recent statements, Territory and South Australian voters would have to take his remarks today with a bag of salt."
"Only three weeks ago, Mr Keating said 'one's got to wonder where the benefit to South Australia is'. He was reported to have given the project the 'thumbs down'." Mr Perron said.

"Even in his statement today Mr Keating refuses to accept that the railway is a Commonwealth responsibility.

"He says that he is happy to fund the remaining surveying so that the commercial viability of future proposals can be more accurately ascertained.

"We have had more than enough reports. Only last week we finally managed to get out of Senator Collins AN's report that shows the project is commercially viable."

Mr Perron said that when the Coalition promised to fund the final surveying work it had said it would ensure that the significant amount of work already done on this project would not be wasted.

"That's what the situation has been under the past ten years of Labor," Mr Perron said. "Labor were the ones that promised to complete the railway ten years ago and have done nothing.

"While both sides have promised to spend $3million, the Coalition's attitude is far more promising for the future of the railway and the Territory because a Hewson Government plans to make it a matter of urgency."

Contact: Jim O'Brien 89 6224
Dear Minister


After reading the report, which vindicates the position taken by my government on this project, I feel I must express to you my great surprise at the considerable period of time which elapsed before you authorised its public release.

The AN Report confirms that the project has demonstrable economic benefits for the nation and categorically dismisses the 1984 inquiry by Mr David Hill, now the Chief Executive of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. The Hill Report has effectively been used as one of the principal dismissive arguments against the project by the governments of Prime Minister Hawke and Prime Minister Keating.

The salient findings categorically assert that the project is viable, will produce an operational surplus in year one with no subsidy dependence on the Commonwealth Budget, as well as creating immediate employment and new opportunities for national economic growth.

I would have thought that the importance of the report would have been recognised by you, and that its public release would have been automatic.

Despite repeated requests you kept the report secret for many weeks, and in my view your inaction over that period owes more to your obligations to the Federal ALP rather than your obligations to the people of the Northern Territory.

Yours sincerely,

MARSHALL PERRON

Northern Territory Government